



Building futures through education.

Statement for the Record of the
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education

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Summary: This testimony provides information and recommendations for
FY2007 appropriations for Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program,
administered by the U.S. Department of Education

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Statement for the Record of the
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education
FY 2007 Appropriations for the U.S. Department of Education
Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program
March 2006

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) appreciates the opportunity to submit recommendations for FY2007 appropriations for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program.

NAEHCY is a national non-profit membership organization composed of state and local educators, service providers, researchers, and others who work to ensure the school access and success of children whose lives are disrupted by the loss of housing. Our members work in state and local education agencies across the country to implement subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program), as well as in shelters and community agencies serving families and youth experiencing homelessness.

Program Purpose: Removing the Barriers to Education Caused by Homelessness

Homelessness is a lack of permanent housing resulting from extreme poverty; the mean income of families experiencing homelessness is less than half the poverty line.¹ Other contributing factors include domestic violence, health problems, natural disasters, and, for youth on their own, family conflict and/or neglect. Nationally, an estimated 1.35 million children will experience homelessness over the course of a year.²

Children experiencing homelessness face unique barriers to education. These barriers include being unable to meet enrollment requirements (such as providing proof of residency, immunizations, legal guardianship, and school records); high mobility resulting in lack of school stability and educational continuity; lack of transportation; lack of school supplies and clothing; and poor health, fatigue, and hunger. When these barriers are not addressed, homeless children and youth often are unable to attend, or even enroll in, school, which prevents them from obtaining the education that is their best hope of escaping poverty as adults.

The Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program was created specifically to remove the barriers to education caused by homelessness. It was amended by the No Child Left Behind Act and now requires all school districts to designate a homeless liaison, pro-actively identify homeless children and youth, expedite enrollment, and provide transportation to stabilize the educational placements of homeless students. Formula grants are provided to State Educational Agencies (SEAs) based on the State's share of Title I, Part A funds. SEAs provide subgrants to local educational agencies (LEAs) on a competitive basis. SEAs also provide

¹ Burt, Aron, Douglas, et al., *Homelessness: Programs and the People They Serve: Summary Report-Findings of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 1999).

² Burt, M. & Laudan, A., *America's Homeless II: Populations and Services* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2000).

support to all LEAs in the State (those with and without subgrants), including training, technical assistance, oversight and guidance in carrying out their responsibilities. These statewide activities help to ensure a consistent response across the nation. Due to limited funding, only 6% of LEAs nationally receive subgrants, which are awarded to LEAs based on need (the number of homeless students identified) and the quality of the grant proposal. Local subgrant funds are used by school districts for outreach and identification, enrollment assistance, transportation assistance, school records transfer, immunization referrals, tutoring, counseling, clothing, school supplies, assessments, professional development for educators, and referrals for community services. These services are supplemental to the regular academic program and are targeted to meet the unique needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

Program Effectiveness: Meeting Unique Needs in Times of Crisis

Funding for the EHCY program makes possible a unique service delivery system designed to ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are ready and able to participate in school and have the same opportunities as other children to achieve to high academic standards. Across the nation, homeless liaisons in every school district are responsible for ensuring that children experiencing homelessness are identified, enrolled in school, and receive appropriate services. Homeless liaisons work closely with schools to arrange for free meals, school supplies, transportation, clothing, and referrals to emergency social services – including frequently-needed mental health services. At the same time, liaisons collaborate with local homeless shelters and community agencies to ensure that comprehensive services are provided without duplication of effort.

The EHCY program is an invaluable system for assisting children who lose their housing, regardless of the reason for that loss. In August 2005, the unprecedented disaster of the Gulf Coast hurricanes caused hundreds of thousands of school age children to be torn from their homes and stable school environments and scattered around the country. Many of these students were displaced multiple times. In spite of the chaos in their lives, one area of their world was stable and constant: school. Schools across the country were able to quickly enroll and provide services to displaced children because EHCY programs were in place, ready and able to support these children. EHCY provisions on liaisons, enrollment, school stability, transportation, and collaborative relationship with community agencies were pivotal in helping schools address the needs of displaced children and youth. Indeed, the *New York Times* called the EHCY program a “bright light” in the federal response to the hurricanes.

“The first thing the evacuee families have asked us is, ‘When can we get our children enrolled in school?’ Being able to give them the enrollment packet and begin the process immediately has been a return to normalcy. A child at a shelter (age 14) was separated from his grandmother at the Superdome. His father abandoned him at the shelter the previous night and did not return. The next day when we had school registration, he came to register himself for school. He was able to register because of the EHCY program and the fact that we did have a process in place. The student came to the safest place he knew and not only was able to register in school, but we were able to get the info and reunite him with another family member in Louisiana.”

- Homeless liaison, McKinney Independent School District, Texas

Fortunately, many school districts that received a high number of displaced students also received subgrant funding through the EHCY program. Those districts were thus equipped with additional personnel, more comprehensive programming and services, and greater familiarity and

“I worked with a student who was in the second grade and had a brother in first grade. They lived with their mother and moved from house to house. Once during the year they were removed from their mother and placed in temporary foster care, and were therefore eligible for the homeless education program. The morning after this happened, I met with the little girl. She tearfully told me the story and that she was going to have to change schools. I told her we could send a bus to the house she was staying at. The next time I saw her she threw her arms around me and said, ‘You saved my life. I don’t have to change schools!’ Although changing schools does not endanger a child’s life, it does in the eyes of a 7 year old. She was eventually returned to her mother. Over the entire school year, if not for the EHCY program, she would have had to change schools three times. She is an excellent student and her education was not interrupted from frequent moves.”

Homeless Liaison, Rutherford County, Tennessee

expertise in meeting the myriad needs of families who lack permanent housing. Thus, while the EHCY program provided a nationwide response system for all schools, the extra funding received by highly impacted school districts ensured an even greater level of service.

The Gulf Coast hurricanes put a spotlight on issues faced by all homeless families. All homeless children are traumatized by the lack of permanent housing and the uncertainty it brings. These children face the threat of continued disruption in their education, as well as challenges in obtaining good nutrition and health care, transportation problems, the mental health consequences of homelessness, loss of material possessions, and lack of personal space and privacy. Moreover, most children and youth experiencing homelessness are invisible to their communities and to their schools; they hide their living situation out of fear, shame, and stigma. Without the specific requirements of the EHCY program to provide outreach and identification and to target services to meet their unique needs, these

children would remain unseen and unserved. Therefore, the EHCY program is essential to the mission of the No Child Left Behind Act. The most qualified teacher, or the most exceptional math or reading program, will provide little benefit to children who are not enrolled in school, not attending regularly, and not assisted to overcome the barriers to their academic success caused by homelessness.

Program Report to Congress

A recent Report to Congress (*Report to the President and Congress On the Implementation of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act*, U.S. Department of Education, March 2006) highlights the accomplishments of the EHCY program. The report notes that:

“States and local educational agencies (LEAs) have generally made significant progress in reducing the barriers that homeless children and youth face in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school. The legislation has prompted States and LEAs to focus more on the needs of homeless students and has helped facilitate the expansion of local support networks to meet those needs. Most recently, McKinney-Vento has been an invaluable tool for assisting students who were left homeless by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Although the appropriation levels for this program are relatively small, the impact of the program has been very widespread.”

In addition, the report calls attention to the impact of increased funding provided by Congress in FY2002 and FY2003: as a result of those increases, there has been a 56 percent increase in the number of local subgrants that States have awarded, enabling a greater number of school districts to provide supplemental services to more homeless children and youth. Even more striking, the number of students (preK-12) served by the subgrants increased by 52 percent since 2002. The finding is clear: increased funding to the EHCY program results in more subgrants, and therefore more children who are identified and served.

But many challenges remain.

According to the report, only 48% of children identified as homeless and enrolled in school are attending school in districts that receive homeless education subgrants. This means that the majority of homeless children in the nation are not receiving the extra time, attention, services, and support that funding through this program can provide.

NAEHCY strongly urges this subcommittee to support the \$70 million authorized for the EHCY program. An appropriation of \$70 million for the EHCY program would have clear, demonstrable, and positive impacts on the educational outcomes of this nation’s most vulnerable students by:

- Ensuring that more LEAs receive subgrants, leading to an increase in the number of homeless children who receive the extra help they need to be successful in school, as well as an increase in the level of services tailored to the needs of the children and the community;
- Enabling LEAs to increase their staffing for outreach, awareness, and identification activities, thus helping districts locate children and youth who are not in school or are “hidden” and highly mobile in the community;
- Allowing for greater provision of, and referrals to, mental health services, which children need in order to recover from their traumas and to be able to concentrate on their school work;

“After training our County social workers, I received a call about a fourteen-year-old girl living in a motel with her mother. Jodi was registered for school, but not attending. I learned that Jodi had been in eleven schools. The family was in tremendous turmoil, which included parental incarceration, eviction from a homeless shelter, great financial hardship, employment problems, and other emotional challenges. At that time, Jodi was emotionally unable to participate in school due to severe, life-threatening depression, and so she simply stopped going to school. We immediately referred Jodi for mental health support and we provided her with educational services, including transportation to her school while her living arrangements were unstable. Jodi is now successfully participating in a full day school program, is receiving ongoing mental health services, and is optimistic about completing high school. Her story is not unique, and it is no exaggeration to say that, without the homeless education program, Jodi would be on her way to dropping out of school and joining the ranks of those who suffer from long lasting, debilitating, and costly mental health and social problems in connection with homelessness and related issues.”

Homeless Liaison, Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia

- Increasing school stability by helping LEAs meet the costs of transporting homeless children and youth back to their schools of origin. This transportation requirement is among the most effective in the EHCY program for ensuring educational continuity, but, as noted in the recent Report to Congress, LEAs have struggled with the cost of providing this transportation;
- Enhancing homeless children’s participation in school activities by increasing funding for other kinds of transportation, such as to before and after-school academic programs and the extra-curricular activities that help keep children connected to and engaged in school;
- Increasing support for preschool age children experiencing homelessness. Nationally, over 40% of homeless children are under the age of five, and very vulnerable to the ill effects of homelessness on their health and development, yet this population remains underserved by the EHCY program due to lack of funding;
- Allowing districts to provide more targeted supplemental academic services, such as tutoring programs in shelters and motels, as well as summer school programs;
- Providing greater assistance for unaccompanied homeless youth, who are among the most challenging subpopulations for LEAs to identify and serve because of the lack of a parent or guardian in their lives, and the abuse and/or neglect that often lead to their homelessness.

NAEHCY appreciates the opportunity to submit recommendations to Congress regarding the FY2007 appropriations for the EHCY program. We look forward to working with the Appropriations Committee so that all children who suffer the crisis of homelessness can find stability, support, and hope for the future through education.

“...Through it all, school is probably the only thing that has kept me going. I know that every day that I walk in those doors, I can stop thinking about my problems for the next six hours and concentrate on what is most important to me. Without the support of my school system, I would not be as well off as I am today. School keeps me motivated to move on, and encourages me to find a better life for myself.”

Formerly homeless student, scholarship winner, and college student

1991–1993 Center for Human Services Modesto, CA
Coordinator – Elementary Counseling

- Developed a comprehensive elementary counseling program serving 6 schools in the Modest City School District.
- Coordinated activities with teachers, principals and parents to assess the needs of students and implement appropriate interventions.
- Served as a liason to community based organizations for providing extended support and assistance to children and their families.
- Provided Parent Training Workshops using the “Preparing for the Drug Free Years” curriculum.

1989 Sylvan Unified School District Modesto, CA
Behavioral Management Consultant

- Developed and presented Behavioral Management training for teachers at the elementary level.

1979–1980 Learning and Counseling Center Stockton, CA
Counselor

- Conducted educational evaluations of elementary school aged children.
- Developed individualized intervention programs based on evaluation findings.

1978–1979 Catholic Charities Stockton, CA
Behaviorist

- Provided individualized assessment of young adults with exceptional needs.
- Developed behavioral strategies and provided individualized instruction and training.
- Provided services in the clinic, home, and community.

1978–1979 Behavioral Intervention Services Stockton, CA
Behavioral Specialist

- Provided individualized assessment of young adults with exceptional needs.
- Conducted on site, direct observation and data collection.
- Developed science based interventions, and trained teachers and parents as care providers for children and young adults with special needs.

EDUCATION

1976–1980 University of the Pacific Stockton, CA
B.A., Psychology.

- Specialty Training & Certification in Applied Behavior Analysis.
- Recipient of the Departmental Award for Distinguished Graduate in Psychology.

1985-1987 University of San Francisco San Francisco, CA
M.A., Educational Counseling.

INTERESTS

1984–1999 Volunteer in the Public Schools

Served in many capacities as an active parent with 3 children in the public school system. These include: PTA responsibilities, Fundraising, and Teacher/Principal support.

NAEHCY FEDERAL FUNDING DISCLOSURE

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth has received the following federal grants:

2005-2006 – National Center for Homeless Education subcontractor to provide technical assistance to school districts impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita - \$60,000